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Anticipating the impact of drought in Lesotho

Key findings from the Anticipatory Action activation 2023/24

Lesotho is prone to drought and other climate shocks. With 50% of the population living in poverty and agriculture as a major livelihood source for 70% of the rural population, drought disrupts livelihoods and people's ability to meet their food security, nutrition, and other essential needs.

WFP, the Government of Lesotho, and other stakeholders have collaborated to proactively prepare for drought events, defining "anticipatory actions" in four piloted districts that were highly vulnerable to drought. These are actions to be taken in the window of opportunity between when a drought is forecasted and when its impacts are felt by vulnerable communities.

In July 2023, a severe, El Niño-induced drought was forecasted for the 2023-24 rain season. The set triggers for the Lesotho drought Anticipatory Action Plan (AAP) were activated, having reached the 'severe' threshold, leading to the activation of the AAP for the first time. As a result, WFP provided cash transfers, seeds and shade nets to 41,200 people to help them prepare for the drought. Nearly 800,000 people also received Early Warning messages, which provided recommendations on withstanding the forecasted dry conditions.

This document analyzes the outcomes of the activation and presents key recommendations.

January 2025

In a nutshell



WHAT HAPPENED

WHEN

July 2023 - July 2024

WHERE

4 districts (Mafeteng, Mohale's Hoek, Quthing & Thaba-Tseka)

WITH WHO

Government of Lesotho and Lesotho Red Cross Society

WHAT



41,000

People reached with anticipatory transfers (cash, drought-tolerant seeds and shadenets)



792,000

People reached with early warning information



3.19M

Funds disbursed (USD)

KEY RESULTS

KEY OUTCOME

Anticipatory Action (AA) had a significant positive effect in shielding people served from poor food consumption, as well as reducing the prevalence of negative coping strategies

KEY INDICATORS *

FOOD CONSUMPTION SCORE: AA assistance reduced the proportion of people supported reporting poor food consumption by 8 percentage points and improved overall food consumption scores by 3 points

NEGATIVE COPING STRATEGIES: AA assistance increased the proportion of people who did not have to adopt livelihood coping strategies by 12 percentage points (LCS), and reduced the index that measures consumption-based coping strategies by 2.4 points (rCSI)

USE OF EARLY WARNING MESSAGES: 80% of Early Warning information recipients reported the early warning messages to be timely and clear. The adoption of recommended practices was similar for both the people receiving anticipatory assistance and control group

TYPE OF INTERVENTIONS: In most cases, AA results were greatest where people received cash and seeds, rather than solely cash



* Indicating the impact of drought in Lesotho
These indicators compare outcome results for the people supported with a counterfactual scenario in which they would not have received the AA benefits. This was assessed using a control group who did not receive WFP assistance, for which an Inverse Probability Weighting methodology was applied to the results to enable a valid counterfactual.

Implementing Anticipatory Action

SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

Since 2022, WFP has been working with national stakeholders to develop the necessary systems for Anticipatory Action. Key steps include:

- Stakeholders co-drafted and agreed on an Anticipatory Action Plan, predefining the actions to take and funding to pre-allocate for different forecast scenarios.
- The Disaster Management Authority (DMA) established a Sector Working Group for Anticipatory Action to coordinate among various government agencies and national and international organizations.
- WFP strengthened capacities for forecasting droughts, through trainings and co-developing trigger models for activating the Anticipatory Action Plan with the Lesotho Meteorological Services and the [International Research Institute for Climate and Society \(IRI\)](#).



TRIGGER REACHED

In July 2023, the Lesotho Meteorological Services reached a trigger for severe drought in Lesotho. The seasonal forecast predicted below-normal rainfall during the period October-November-December 2023 and extending to December-January-February 2024. This meant the drier conditions would coincide with the crucial planting season of November to December and directly impact the April-June 2024 harvest, likely resulting in poor yields.

The forecast prompted the activation of the Anticipatory Action Plan in the four piloted districts to reduce the impact of the drought on people's livelihoods and agricultural productivity.

ACTIVATION

In line with the Anticipatory Action Plan, stakeholders implemented the following key actions:

- **Early warning messages:** A cross-sector workshop was convened in August for government ministries and WFP to co-produce early warning messages. The messages explained the forecast and key actions for households to take to mitigate the drought's expected impact. The messages were disseminated to communities in September through local government, public gatherings, radio, social media and short message services, with additional updates sent subsequently.
- **Cash transfers and agricultural inputs:** Cash was distributed to 10,300 households in November 2023 – April 2024 and seeds and shade nets to the same households in January - February 2024.¹ The cash distribution had been scheduled to conclude in January 2024, but there were some delays in implementation, such as delays relating to

¹ Cash transfers distributed to 10,325 households; seeds and shadenets distributed to 10,284 households.

procurement processes and the registration of people's households, and so it concluded in April.

- **Access to safe water:** WFP supported the construction and rehabilitation of boreholes, along with the procurement of water tanks, to support the sustained access to safe water for household and agricultural use.

The timely onset of rains allowed for timely planting in the affected districts, defying initial forecasts. However, as the season progressed, these districts experienced low rainfall and dry

conditions, negatively impacting crops during critical growth stages. This caused disruption in water access and led to reduced yields for the April-June 2024 harvest. Crop production is estimated to have decreased by 7-23 percent in maize (the staple crop) compared to the five-year average, except in Quthing, where production tripled.² Overall, production met 4-11 percent of the districts' requirements, with Quthing achieving 65 percent.³

The next section will assess the impact of the anticipatory assistance on helping communities to cope with the drought.



2 The positive result in Quthing is attributed to planting occurring earlier than other districts. Quthing also experienced favourable conditions in October to December, allowing crops to have passed critical growing stages when dry conditions set in between February and March.

3 The agricultural production in Lesotho has been fluctuating significantly due to recurrent climatic events such as prolonged dry spells, erratic rains, heavy rains and early frost. In the past five years the production in the four AA districts experienced varying levels of production relative to their requirements: 10-123% in Mafeteng, 0-38% in Mohale's Hoek, 4-35% in Thaba-tseka and Quthing 1-40%.

TIMELINE OF DROUGHT ANTICIPATORY ACTION



DRY SEASON



PLANTING



GROWING



HARVEST



HARVEST/DRY SEASON

JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG

2022 - 2023

2024

AA SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT:

- Anticipatory Action Plan (AAP) prepared + funds pre-allocated
- Sector Working Group established
- Training and awareness-raising workshops on AA
- Anticipatory actions activated

Jul: Forecasts issued for severe drought in the country. Activations of AAPs confirmed by Sector Working Group.

Aug - Sep

READINESS ACTIVITIES:

- Verification of targeted households
- Requests for release of funds for activation
- Meetings with relevant government ministries to facilitate AA activation plans

Aug: Cross-sector workshop convenes to co-produce early warning messages, disseminated from September

IMPLEMENTATION OF ANTICIPATORY ACTIONS:

- Cash distributed (*Nov - Apr*)
- Seeds and shadenets distributed (*Jan - Feb*)
- Access to safe water supported (*Nov - Jul*) e.g. installation of water tanks, spring catchments and pipelining for water tanks, borehole construction and rehabilitation
- Capacity strengthening for people receiving anticipatory support e.g. training on homestead gardening for vegetation production (*Oct - Feb*)

Nov - Jul

Lesotho declares state of food insecurity disaster, following extreme drought conditions

Jul: After-action review with key national stakeholders



Results of the activation

Endline data was collected after the Anticipatory Action interventions in April 2024 from the people receiving anticipatory assistance and a control group who did not receive WFP assistance. 10% of the control group had received some form of assistance, mainly from the government and other international NGOs, which may have influenced their outcome results.

The data was analyzed to understand the effect of the Anticipatory Action programme, weighting the results to account for differences between the two groups.⁴ This enabled a comparison with a counterfactual scenario in which the group of people supported would not have received the AA benefits, therefore indicating the overall effect of the AA assistance.

Overall, Anticipatory Action helped to protect food security and reduce the use of negative coping strategies, particularly where both cash and seeds were provided.

Households receiving AA assistance were more food secure

AA assistance improved average food consumption scores by 3 points, compared with the counterfactual scenario in which the people supported would not have received AA assistance. This result can be taken as a proxy

to indicate improved food security, factoring in the frequency of consuming food, dietary diversity and the nutritional value of different food groups.

AA assistance also reduced the proportion of people supported reporting poor food consumption by 8 percentage points, indicating that the assistance helped to shield their food security from the full impact of the drought.

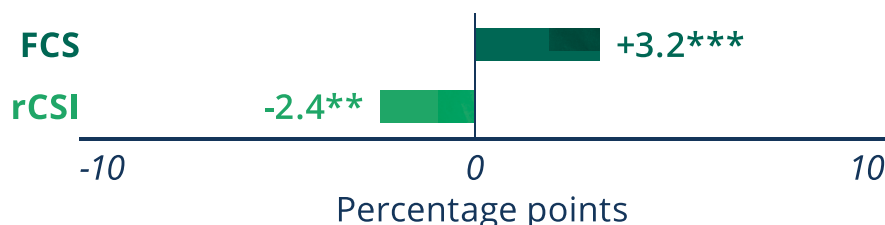
Households receiving AA assistance were less reliant on coping strategies

Households receiving anticipatory support also reported less reliance on negative coping strategies, both for adopting livelihood coping strategies and for strategies to meet basic food needs.

Receiving AA assistance increased the proportion of people supported who did not have to adopt livelihood coping strategies by 12 percentage points, and decreased the likelihood of having to adopt stress, crisis and emergency coping strategies.

Recipients of WFP assistance reported a lower consumption-based coping strategy index by 2.4 points (rCSI). This result means that the people receiving anticipatory support had to adopt coping mechanisms to meet their basic food needs on a less frequent and/or less severe basis than if they had not received this assistance.

Figure 1: Effect of receiving WFP AA assistance on FCS and rCSI scores (IPW regression results)



⁴ To account for demographic differences between the people supported and control group and thus determine more accurately the effect of the AA interventions, an inverse probability weighting methodology was applied. This methodology effectively matches people receiving anticipatory support to respondents from the control group with similar characteristics.

Providing cash and seeds to the people receiving anticipatory assistance had the greatest impact, rather than solely cash

Among the people receiving anticipatory support, food consumption scores were highest among those who received both cash and drought-resistant seeds, rather than solely cash.

Similarly, the reduced likelihood of poor food consumption was greatest for recipients of both cash and seeds, or of cash and seeds and shade nets, rather than cash only.

The results were more varied for coping strategies. The reduction in consumption-based coping strategies was greatest for those who received cash and seeds, in line with the above results, however the reduction in livelihood coping strategies was largest for the people who only received cash.

Early warning information was identified as useful. The adoption of recommended practices was similar for the people receiving anticipatory assistance and those not receiving it.

Early warning information, including recommendations on drought-resistant practices, were widely received by the people receiving anticipatory support (92% of respondents) and the control group (74% of respondents). This highlights the thorough dissemination of the messages. The most popular means of communication used for dissemination of early warning messages were public gatherings, which contributed to 79% reach - as it is highly preferred by the people receiving anticipatory support - followed by radio and SMS channels.

The early warning information was seen as timely and clear by approximately 80% of respondents across both groups. 73% of the people AA supported reported that they were 'very satisfied' with the messages received.

31% of the people receiving anticipatory support reported that they experienced challenges in adopting the recommended practices, compared with 44% of the control group, although both groups



reported similar levels of the actual adoption of the recommended practices. The main challenge reported in adopting the recommended practices was monetary constraints, particularly for the control group.

Most of the people spent cash assistance on food. Spending decisions were largely made jointly between the people receiving anticipatory assistance and their spouses.

Almost all households (96%) used cash assistance to buy food. Other common spending categories include school-related expenses (50%), clothing (45%), and household items (29%). This indicates that food and other essential needs were the key concern for most of the population.

Of the people receiving anticipatory support who stayed with their spouses in the last three months of the survey (more than half of the people), approximately 80% made joint decisions on the use of WFP cash and other household resources. This indicates a collaborative approach on decision-making in most households.

More than 60% of people receiving anticipatory assistance also mentioned that the cash assistance arrived at the right time. While this is positive, it highlights that more needs to be done to ensure the delivery of cash assistance at a

time it is most useful to the people. Operational readiness and preparedness should be strengthened to avoid delays upon confirmation of activation, such as ensuring that Long-Term Agreements (LTAs) with service providers are in place and that the database of people AA supports is ready in time.

The people receiving anticipatory support did not face major barriers or security challenges in accessing WFP assistance

Only 7.8% of the people reported challenges in accessing assistance. These challenges were mainly due to people not receiving effective communication on the availability of cash vouchers, which expired before they could be redeemed. Additional challenges in accessing assistance were caused by long distances to redemption sites and flooding during heavy rains, which restricted movement.



Lessons learned for future activations

Key areas for improvement and lessons learned for enhancing programme implementation in subsequent activations include the following:

What worked well

Government leadership and stakeholder coordination:

- The government Disaster Management Authority demonstrated strong leadership in the anticipatory action programme, particularly for the development of the AAP and the programme implementation. This resulted in effective stakeholder coordination and commitment.
- Partners and WFP staff were effectively sensitized on anticipatory action, leading to a solid understanding of its objectives.

Assistance provided:

- Early warning information was communicated effectively, with timely and easy-to-understand messages. Multiple communication channels ensured broad access, despite financial limitations faced by some of the people who were to adopt the suggested actions.
- The people reported that the distribution of cash was timely and sufficient to meet basic household needs, although some were unaware of initial distribution dates.
- Provision of cash along with drought-tolerant seeds had positive results in protecting households' food consumption.
- Complaint and feedback mechanisms were implemented effectively, with feedback adequately collected from people receiving anticipatory support.

Areas for improvement

Programme implementation:

- Some districts experienced delays in the commencement of cash distributions, such as due to delays relating to procurement processes, challenges in engaging service providers, the registration of households receiving anticipatory support and uploading data in SCOPE. Payments scheduled for November 2023 were made in January 2024, with many of the people who received anticipatory assistance unaware of the initial distribution timeline.
- While the pre-defined readiness activities were followed as per the AAP, it is critical for WFP to take ongoing preparedness actions and assess its operational readiness to enable timely implementation. For example, by ensuring there is an updated list of Long-Term Agreements with service providers, that lists in SCOPE are clean, and that the government has an updated database of vulnerable groups to enable the quick registration of targeted households upon AA triggers being reached.
- While the provision of adequate water was a positive step, there were delays in implementation. This delay was due to requiring technical guidance and support from the government, such as to provide specifications and quantities for the water interventions. The benefits of water tank installations were consequently not realised in the anticipatory window of interest, with the water tanking to installed tanks and borehole drilling only completed in April-June. In future activations, water-related AA interventions should have pre-defined specifications and technical information prepared upfront to enable timely implementation.

- The SCOPE tool proved invaluable for registration of people receiving anticipatory support and was recommended for adoption in other WFP programmes. However, the extent of data cleaning required meant that there were delays in uploading data.

Key actions for improvement

- Improve planning for Anticipatory Action. For example, water assessments should be conducted during periods without activation or programme implementation, given the time required for the assessments. The country office should also put in place Long Term Agreements to avoid lengthy procurement processes with partners.
- Data in SCOPE should be cleaned on time to avoid delays during programme implementation.





World Food Programme

Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70,
00148 Rome, Italy - T +39 06 65131

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